



Drinking Water Operator Training Voucher Program

Water Protection Program fact sheet

12/2008

Frequently Asked Questions

This document was drafted as a reference guide to answer common questions about the voucher program. If you have a question or concern about the grant or voucher program not addressed in this document or the Drinking Water Operator Training Voucher Program instruction sheet, contact the Operator Certification Section at 800-361-4827.

What is the Voucher Program?

The Missouri Department of Natural Resources received a \$3.1 million Drinking Water Operator Expense Reimbursement Grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Grants were awarded to each state as a result of the 1996 amendments to the Safe Drinking Water Act. The intent of the grant is to provide money for the training and certification of individuals operating community and non-transient, non-community drinking water systems serving 3,300 or less. The department created a voucher system to distribute funds to eligible drinking water systems.

What drinking water systems are eligible to receive vouchers?

To be eligible, a drinking water system must be classified as either a community or non-transient non-community public water system and serve a population of 3,300 or less.

What systems will receive vouchers?

Vouchers are automatically issued to systems that have used them previously (whether it was \$5 or the full amount issued) and are still eligible for the grant. Systems that have not used vouchers will not automatically receive new vouchers. Instead, those systems must submit a written response stating their desire to participate. This increases the amount of voucher funds that can be distributed to participating systems.

When will vouchers be issued?

Vouchers are scheduled to be issued each year in January.

How long will the vouchers be valid?

Vouchers can be used for the calendar year in which they are issued and expire Dec. 31.

Can old vouchers be used?

Vouchers may be used until they expire. When vouchers expire, they become void and are not valid for use. Vouchers must be submitted by Feb. 28 of the following calendar year and will only be valid for eligible courses that were completed or certification fees incurred prior to expiration date of the year they were issued.

After vouchers have expired, should they be destroyed?

Yes, it is recommended that unused, expired voucher stickers be destroyed to prevent them from accidentally being used. The red and white voucher forms have not changed and can be used with any valid stickers.

What is the dollar value of voucher stickers each water system will receive?

Each year, the amount issued to each participating system will be less than the previous year. The amount issued is calculated based on unused vouchers from the previous voucher cycle and the number of systems participating. Water systems with treatment beyond chlorine are issued a higher voucher value than distribution-only systems.

What about eligible water systems with both distribution and treatment systems?

Eligible water systems with both distribution and treatment systems will receive the amount allocated for treatment systems.

What happens if a water system does not spend all of the voucher money? Does the water system get the remainder in cash?

No. Unused voucher money will not be provided to water systems. Water systems are not receiving actual money, instead grant funds have been allocated to each system in the form of vouchers. When the vouchers have expired, the department will evaluate the success of the voucher program and make a decision on how to further implement the grant.

Can vouchers be used at any drinking water training?

Two conditions must be met to use a voucher to pay for a training course.

1. The course must be a pre-approved drinking water course. This is determined by the number of renewal hours awarded to the course. To be eligible for vouchers, the number of drinking water treatment or drinking water distribution renewal hours must be equal to or greater than the renewal hours awarded to wastewater. The table below provides examples of courses that are eligible and not eligible for vouchers, based on the number of renewal hours awarded.

Drinking Water Treatment Hours	Distribution Hours	Wastewater Hours	Voucher Eligible?
6	4	4	Yes
2	6	4	Yes
6	6	6	Yes
6	4	6	Yes
4	6	6	Yes
4	4	6	No*

* In this example, the number of wastewater hours awarded exceed the number of hours awarded to both water treatment and distribution.

2. The trainer or training organization must agree to accept vouchers as payment. The department expects most trainers will accept vouchers as payment, however each trainer has the choice whether or not to do so.

Can vouchers be used for wastewater examinations and renewals?

No. The only examinations and certifications for which the vouchers can be used are drinking water treatment and drinking water distribution. This is because the grant is a result of amendments to the federal Safe Drinking Water Act. According to the Act, the intent of the grant is to provide assistance for drinking water (not wastewater) examinations, certifications and training only.

What is considered wastewater training?

Training where the number of wastewater hours is greater than the number of both drinking water treatment and drinking water distribution hours.

How can operators tell if a training class is eligible to receive vouchers?

Courses that are eligible to receive vouchers are listed in the *Water & Wastewater Digest* and on the Operator Certification page of the department's Web site at www.dnr.mo.gov/env/wpp/opcert/optrain.htm. In addition, training providers will be encouraged to advertise that courses are eligible for vouchers.

Can vouchers be used for testing supplies and equipment, operator salaries, primacy fees, or the costs of travel, meals and lodging to attend training?

No. Vouchers cannot be used for any of the above purposes. Vouchers can only be used for fees associated with drinking water operator certification. This includes operator examinations, renewal certificates and voucher-approved drinking water training.

Can vouchers be used to pay for correspondence and online courses?

Yes. Vouchers can be used to pay for voucher-approved correspondence and online courses.

In this situation, operators will need to request reimbursement from the department after the course is successfully completed. Operators are encouraged to contact the Operator Certification Section prior to enrolling in a correspondence course to confirm that the course will be eligible for reimbursement using vouchers.

An operator has just completed a voucher-eligible correspondence course. How do they receive reimbursement?

The operator will need to submit the following items:

- Proof that the course has been successfully completed (such as a copy of the course completion certificate).
- A copy of the receipt showing how the course was paid for and who paid for the course.
- A completed voucher form with the appropriate amount of voucher stickers attached.
- A letter from the party that paid for the class. The letter should include the reimbursement request and a mailing address where to send the payment.

Can vouchers be used to purchase books or manuals not associated with a training course?

No. A voucher cannot be used to purchase books alone. However, books can be provided by an instructor of a voucher-approved training class, when that cost is included in the price of the class.

Fees for books that must be purchased as part of an approved correspondence course are eligible for reimbursement.

If contract operators run a water system, can they use the vouchers?

Yes. Each water system can decide who uses the vouchers. This includes allowing contract operators to use them. However, systems may want to ask their contract operator if they will need the vouchers. Many contract operators operate multiple drinking water systems, and may not need to use vouchers from all of the water systems they operate.

Can the water system use vouchers to send staff who work in other areas such as streets, parks, or wastewater to drinking water training and to apply for drinking water certification?

Yes. One goal of the grant is to help water systems train and certify additional operators if they choose to do so.

For More Information

Missouri Department of Natural Resources

Public Drinking Water Branch

P.O. Box 176

Jefferson City, MO 65102-0176

800-361-4827 or 573-522-9911

www.dnr.mo.gov/env/wpp/dw-index.htm